



---

Cultural Capital and School Success: The Impact of Status Culture Participation on the Grades of U.S. High School Students

Author(s): Paul DiMaggio

Source: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Apr., 1982), pp. 189-201

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094962>

Accessed: 12/11/2009 11:23

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=asa>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



American Sociological Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Sociological Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# CULTURAL CAPITAL AND SCHOOL SUCCESS: THE IMPACT OF STATUS CULTURE PARTICIPATION ON THE GRADES OF U.S. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS\*

PAUL DiMAGGIO

Yale University

*Ethnographers and other students of interaction have documented the impact of status factors on students' success in school. Yet survey research data consistently show the absence of family background measure effects on high school grades. It is argued that conventional measures of family background fail to capture those cultural elements of status that make a difference in school interactions. Drawing on Weber's work on status groups and status cultures, and on Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, this paper reports the findings of an effort to assess the impact of one component of status culture participation—cultural capital—on one aspect of life chances—students' high school grades. A composite measure of cultural capital has a significant impact on grades, controlling for family background and measured ability. The pattern of relationships, however, differs strikingly by gender.*

It takes more than measured ability to do well in school. From Warner et al. (1944) and Hollingshead (1949) to Coleman (1961) and Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963), ethnographers have chronicled the impact of class on almost every aspect of the experience of American high school students. More recently, ethnomethodologists and constituent ethnographers have documented the impact of cultural styles on students' relationships with counselors (Erickson, 1975), test scores (Mehan, 1974), and classroom instruction (McDermott, 1977). Similarly, recent work in the status attainment tradition finds that measured intelligence explains no more than 15 to 30 percent of the variation in students' high school grades (Crouse et al., 1979; Sewell and Hauser, 1975).

At the same time, however, measures of family socioeconomic status have been found to have a negligible impact on grades when

measured ability is controlled (Crouse et al., 1979; Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Portes and Wilson, 1976). If measured ability is not the sole predictor of high school grades and if measured differences in family background are not either, then to what do we attribute variation in student grades? And how may we square our survey research findings with the observations of ethnographers that schools are places in which status and culture matter and "particularistic leakages" (Erickson, 1975) abound?

The answer may be that aspects of cultural style only loosely associated with such measures of family background as father's education or head of household's occupation make an important difference.<sup>1</sup> Max Weber's notion of *status culture* (1968) may be useful in this regard. Weber noted that elite status groups—collectivities bound together by personal ties and a common sense of honor based upon and reinforced by shared conventions—generate or appropriate as their own specific distinctive cultural traits, tastes, and styles. This shared status culture aids group efforts to monopolize for the group as a whole scarce social, economic, and cultural resources by providing coherence to existing social networks and facilitating the development of comradeship, respect, and affection out of which new networks are constructed. The content of a status culture is arbitrary; status honor "may be con-

---

\* Direct all correspondence to: Paul DiMaggio, Department of Sociology, Yale University, New Haven CT 06520.

This paper has benefited from the advice and criticism of Ann Swidler, Christopher Jencks, Harrison White, Susan Bartlett, Ronald Breiger, Randall Collins, Steven Brint, Kevin Dougherty, Jerome Karabel, David Kamens, David Karen, Sally Kilgore, Katherine McClelland, Susan Olzak, Bernice Pescosolido, Richard A. Peterson, Frank Romo, David Swartz, Michael Useem, Blair Wheaton, Vera Zolberg, and two anonymous reviewers. Those listed are emphatically not responsible for any remaining inadequacies. Computer and institutional support from the Harvard University and Yale University Sociology Departments and from Yale University's Institution for Social and Policy Studies is gratefully acknowledged.

---

<sup>1</sup> After assessing the impact of demographic family background characteristics, Jencks and his colleagues (1979) found that "unmeasured background characteristics that vary among families with similar demographic profiles seem to account for significant amounts of variance in occupational status and earnings" (p. 81).

nected with any quality shared by a plurality" (Weber, 1968: part 2, ch. 9).

The impact of a student's cultural resources on his or her success in school has been treated explicitly by Bourdieu (1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), Collins (1975, 1979), and others. According to Bourdieu, schools reward students on the basis of their *cultural capital*, defined as "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (Bourdieu, 1977). Teachers, it is argued, communicate more easily with students who participate in elite status cultures, give them more attention and special assistance, and perceive them as more intelligent or gifted than students who lack cultural capital.

If, indeed, participation in prestigious status cultures represents a kind of cultural capital, we would expect to find the following:

*Hypothesis 1: Measures of cultural capital are related to one another in a manner that suggests the existence of a coherent status culture of which they are elements.*

*Hypothesis 2: Cultural capital is positively related to school success, in particular, to high school grades.*

In much of both the ethnographic and the Weberian tradition, status cultures are seen as resources used to promote intergenerational status persistence; cultural capital is passed down from upper- and upper-middle parents to their children. If this is the case, then

*Hypothesis 3a: Cultural capital mediates the relationship between family background and school outcomes*

What is more, if, as Bourdieu has argued, cultural capital is inculcated in early childhood and the response of others to cultural capital is predicated in part on the social position of its possessor, then

*Hypothesis 4a: Returns to cultural capital are highest for students from high status families and least to students from low status families.*

Let us call this, following Bourdieu, the *cultural reproduction model*.

By contrast, consider the possibility that, as Weber predicted, the rise of the market has severely corroded the status order. While ideal-typical status groups are well defined and strictly demarcated, in modern societies status cultures are more diffuse and more loosely bounded. As the potential membership of a status group becomes less known to any single member, the importance of the shared status culture—those cultural cues that define a person as a member to other members—becomes

greater.<sup>2</sup> Individuals may have a repertoire of status cultures that they draw on selectively (see, e.g., Gumperz and Hymes, 1972, on code switching). In such societies, status culture participation may be deployed unconsciously at the level of daily interaction.

For this reason, it may be more accurate to speak of *status culture participation* than of *status group membership*, and to think of status as a cultural process rather than as an attribute of individuals. A person who is "at home" in a prestigious status culture can display tastes, styles, or understandings that serve as *cultural resources*, making communication easier and indicating status group membership (see Goffman, 1951; Collins, 1981). In such a fluid world childhood experience and family background may only partially and modestly determine a person's stock of cultural capital. Active participation in prestigious status cultures may be a practical and useful strategy for low status students who aspire towards upward mobility. By contrast, both high status students (who, presumably, receive cultural resources in the home) and nonmobile low status students may prefer to participate in adversarial youth subcultures while in high school (Coleman, 1961).

If this is the case, we would expect the following:

*Hypothesis 3b: Cultural capital's impact on school success is largely net that of family background.*

*Hypothesis 4b: Returns to cultural capital are highest for students who are least advantaged.*

I will refer to this as the *cultural mobility model*.

In the sections that follow, I develop a measure of cultural capital and then assess both models using analyses of the relative impact of measured family background, measured ability, and cultural capital on the grades of a national cross-section of white U.S. high school students.

## DATA AND MEASURES

The analyses reported below were undertaken with data from a random sample of white respondents to PROJECT TALENT. TALENT has by far the richest variety of measures of cultural attitudes, information, and activities of approximately twenty data sets reviewed for

<sup>2</sup> Thus Coleman (1971) found that residents of Kansas City relied on much more indirect cues to assess the status of individuals than did citizens of the small towns studied by earlier community researchers.

this investigation. Its disadvantages include its use of self-reported grades and the relatively low correlations among its demographic measures (Porter, 1974), both of which should tend to depress the relationships reported here. The sample includes 1427 men and 1479 women who were in the eleventh grade in public, parochial, and private high schools in 1960, when they were surveyed. The sample is weighted to reflect a cross-section of white American high school students.

Following Bourdieu, I measure high school students' cultural capital using self-reports of involvement in art, music, and literature. While it would be preferable to ground these measures in observed cultures of dominant status groups, in the absence of such a rigorous data base, high cultural measures represent the best alternative for several reasons. First, art, classical music, and literature represent the most popular of the prestigious art forms. Patterns of art museum visitation, concert attendance, and literature reading in the United States are similar to those found in France and other western countries, with attendance and reading concentrated in the upper middle and upper classes (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978).

Second, to the extent that there is a common cultural currency among American elites, it involves at least a modest familiarity with the arts and literature. Such preoccupations as racquetball, wine, or ancient history are likely to characterize smaller, more localized status groups. Minimal familiarity with high culture, by contrast, transcends cleavages of age or region. Third, art and music have received relatively superficial attention in the curricula of American high schools (Rindskopf, 1979). If, as Bourdieu contends, cultural capital consists of familiarity with precisely those subjects that schools do not teach but that elites value, then including art and music permits us to tap dimensions of cultural capital that are inculcated outside of the school. Finally, high culture is an element of elite culture that school teachers appear to regard as legitimate. While American teachers are recruited largely from the lower middle class (Lortie, 1975), they are overrepresented in arts audiences (in proportion to their share of the labor force) more strongly than any other group (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978).

The first step in the analysis was to build a scale of measures of cultural capital. Three kinds of measures from PROJECT TALENT were employed. 1) *Attitude* measures asked students to rate their interest in specified artistic activities and occupations on a scale from one to five. Unlike aspirations questions, the occupational-interest questions simply asked the student to rate the attractiveness of a wide range of careers. In addition, four inventories

or composites generated by TALENT are included among the attitude measures. Three inventories combine questions tapping, respectively, artistic, musical, and literary interests.<sup>3</sup> A fourth composite, the cultivated self-image scale, is based on ten self-evaluation questions, such as "I enjoy beautiful things," or "I am a cultured person." 2) *Activities* measures are based on questions about the extent to which students have created visual arts, performed publicly, attended arts events, or read literature. Except for the arts-attendance questions, which could include school trips, these questions explicitly exclude activities undertaken for school course work.<sup>4</sup> 3) *Information* measures are based on TALENT-administered tests of information about literature, music, and art. All these tests tapped familiarity, appreciation, and historical knowledge, rather than technical skills of the sort developed in practice. In the music information test, for example, students were asked about famous composers rather than about the structure of tonic or dominant chords (Marion Shaycroft, personal communication, June 27, 1979).

Fuller descriptions, including means and standard deviations, of the measures used in these analyses are provided in the Appendix. Boys' reported cultural interests and activities were low; girls' were moderately higher. In short, high culture was a minority taste in American high schools in the 1960s.

## ANALYSIS

Both the cultural reproduction model and the cultural mobility model yield the prediction that separate measures of high cultural involvements should be positively correlated with one another. This prediction inheres in the definition of cultural capital as the mastery of elements of a prestigious status culture. There is no *a priori* reason that students who care about any one art form—art, music, or literature—should be concerned about any

<sup>3</sup> These questions cover a broader range (and are less strictly high cultural) than the specific interest questions included in Table 1. The Artistic Interest Inventory, for example, includes responses to questions about interest in becoming a decorator or designer.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that students from upper middle-class families were tempted to exaggerate these reports, although the low correlations between the self-reports and parental education make this seem somewhat unlikely. False reports, if skewed in this way, would attenuate the relationships between cultural capital measures and grades once background was controlled.

Table 1. Median Correlations and Ranges (in parentheses) of Correlations Between Sets of Cultural Measures

	Interests			Activities			Information		
	Median	Range	N*	Median	Range	N	Median	Range	N
<i>Interests</i>									
W	.71	(.47-.80)	9						
M B	.45	(.32-.60)	27						
W	.73	(.48-.82)	9						
F B	.47	(.35-.63)	27						
<i>Activities</i>									
W	.31	(.22-.40)	9	NA					
M B	.20	(.11-.38)	27	.20	(.12-.29)	6			
W	.33	(.21-.44)	9	NA					
F B	.18	(.06-.34)	27	.17	(.13-.22)	6			
<i>Information</i>									
W	.14	(.06-.24)	9	.11	(.04-.14)	3	NA		
M B	.09	(-.01-.20)	18	.08	(-.03-.26)	9	.67	(.61-.68)	3
W	.29	(.18-.37)	9	.17	(.15-.28)	3	NA		
F B	.26	(.09-.37)	18	.18	(.01-.31)	9	.66	(.60-.68)	3

\* N refers to the number of correlations in each category.

W = Correlations between variables in same discipline (art, music, or literature).

B = Correlations between variables in different disciplines.

NA = Not applicable (only one measure per discipline in this category).

other. Indeed, psychological research indicates that the practice of different art forms draws on substantially different cognitive skills (Wolf and Gardiner, 1979). If we do find that measures of involvement in different artistic disciplines are related, we must look beyond psychological explanations for the answer.

The notion of status culture leads to just such an explanation. To the extent that art, music, and literature are part of a coherent status culture, we would expect students interested in music to be interested in literature and art, and vice versa. Milieus that inculcate an interest in any single artistic discipline will also be likely to inculcate an interest in any other high culture form. This expectation is particularly strong for the attitude and information measures. Participation takes time, so students who value the arts may tend to specialize in practicing one form, while maintaining interest in and knowledge about others. Of particular interest are correlations between measures of involvement in *different* forms. If high cultural involvements constitute elements in a coherent status culture, these between-discipline correlations should be consistently and significantly positive.

The findings are summarized in Table 1. As expected, relationships among high culture attitude measures are strongly positive. The median between-discipline correlations are .45 and .47 for boys and girls, respectively. Relationships among cultural activities are less strong, but all significant at  $p \leq .001$ . Cultural information test scores in different cultural disciplines are also strongly associated, even when one controls for ability test scores in other

areas.<sup>5</sup> Finally, students who engage in one kind of cultural activity are more likely than others to be interested in any other high cultural activity.

It may be objected, however, that the positive correlations simply indicate that all of these measures tap some underlying personality attribute like creativity. Fortunately, TALENT also reports activity measures for several middlebrow cultural pastimes—photography, crafts, woodworking, and needlework. If high cultural involvements really constitute part of a coherent status culture, we would expect to find these measures less strongly correlated with the high culture measures than the latter are with one another. Again, this is the case. Two-thirds and one-half of all correlations between cultural attitudes and cultural activities, for boys and girls respectively, are greater than or equal to .20. None of the correlations between cultural attributes and middlebrow activities reaches this level. Similar findings emerge when we compare correlations between pairs of cultural activities with correlations between cultural and middlebrow activities. (Tables available upon request.)

These findings are consistent, then, with the first proposition of each model, that different

<sup>5</sup> Ability is measured by the student's composite vocabulary score. The commonly employed measure of ability—the composite of thirty-seven information tests administered by TALENT—is contaminated by the inclusion therein of the cultural information test scores. Thus the vocabulary composite, which correlates at .94 with the information composite, is used as a proxy.

Table 2. Factor Loadings for Factors Derived from Factor Analysis of Data on Cultural Interests, Activities, and Test Scores, for Male and Female Eleventh Graders, Project TALENT\*

Factor	Variable	Factor Loadings	Eigen-value	Percentage of Variance
MALES				
1) <u>Cultural Interests</u>	Musical composer	.529	4.217	23.4
	Poet	.649		
	Artist	.857		
	Visiting art galleries	.656		
	Reading literature	.454		
2) <u>Cultural Information</u>	English literature	.832	2.624	14.6
	Music	.725		
	Art	.804		
3) <u>Cultural Capital</u>	Symphony concerts (int.)	.609	1.460	8.1
	Performing (act.)	.442		
	Arts attendance (act.)	.560		
	Literature reading (act.)	.350		
	Cultivated self-image	.361		
4) <u>Middlebrow Activity</u>	Drawing	.406	1.229	6.8
	Photography	.389		
	Crafts	.540		
	Woodworking	.482		
FEMALES				
1) <u>Cultural Interests</u>	Musical composer	.569	4.566	25.4
	Poet	.691		
	Artist	.768		
	Visiting art galleries	.629		
	Reading literature	.506		
2) <u>Cultural Information</u>	English literature	.831	1.947	10.8
	Music	.730		
	Art	.785		
3) <u>Cultural Capital</u>	Symphony concerts (int.)	.499	1.607	8.9
	Performing (act.)	.418		
	Arts attendance	.447		
	Cultivated self-image	.377		
4) <u>Middlebrow Activity</u>	Drawing	.544	1.259	7.0
	Crafts	.571		
	Sewing	.365		

\* Principal component factor analysis with equimax orthogonal rotation; .350 is the cutoff for inclusion of a variable in a factor.

dimensions of involvement with different high culture disciplines are part of a relatively coherent status culture. Note, however, the weak relationships between attitudes or activities in any single discipline and scores on tests of information about any other. This finding suggests the importance of distinguishing among the three dimensions of cultural involvement in assessing and explaining their effects. It also suggests that, at least among teenagers in 1960, artistic attitudes and activities were more important elements of status culture participation than was cultural information.

In order to exploit further the recognition that different cultural dimensions may have different relationships to one another and to school success, and to simplify the subsequent analyses, the cultural measures were factor analyzed. Separate analyses for male and female respondents each yielded four similar factors

with eigenvalues over 1.0. Factor 1, *cultural interests*, consists of all the attitude measures except interest in attending symphony concerts and cultivated self-image, which loaded onto factor 3. Factor 2, *cultural information*, consists of the three cultural information test scores. Factor 3 is the factor of greatest interest because it combines both attitude and activity measures that are particularly high cultural in nature. For this reason, it is interpreted as representing *cultural capital* in its purest form.<sup>6</sup> Factor 4, *middlebrow activities*, con-

<sup>6</sup> While the designation of Factor 3 as "cultural capital" seemed intuitively obvious, there is no doubt an element of subjectivity in any such choice. Some of the conscious elements entering into the decision include the following: the cultivated self-image scale includes some self-assessment items that are very close to the idea of participation in a prestigious

sists of nonhigh culture creative pursuits, excluding, for each gender, those in which the fewest students reported participation. It also includes drawing, which, for both genders, clustered with the crafts rather than with the arts activities.

Each of these four factors represents a kind of cultural resource, and each represents a coherent set of interrelated traits. Factor 4 should have little, if any, positive impact on students' grades, unless, perhaps, it represents a measure of creativity. Factor 1 should have less of an impact on grades than factors 2 or 3, because it measures attitudes rather than actual behavior or information. If status culture participation influences grades because students display their knowledge in a manner that impresses teachers or boosts their performance on tests, we would expect factor 2 to have a major impact. If we believe that cultural capital consists of a set of interests, dispositions, behaviors, and styles that are learned and enacted socially, then we would predict that factor 3, cultural capital, would have the greatest impact. This is the case not just because factor 3 includes measures of high cultural activities, but because the factor is the only one that crosscuts question types as well. While all of these factors are, of course, only indirect measures of cultural resources that students bring to interactions with significant others, it is predicted that factor 3, cultural capital, will have the greatest impact on grades.

To test the hypothesis that cultural capital significantly influences grades, separate regressions were executed for male and female eleventh graders. Independent variables include cultural factors 1, 3, and 4, the student's report of his or her father's educational attainment, and the student's composite score in the TALENT vocabulary tests.<sup>7</sup> Factor 2, Cultural Information, was excluded from the analysis because of its high collinearity (over .800) with the composite ability measure. The strength of

this correlation suggests that students' cultural information test scores were largely determined by some underlying set of aptitudes, skills, and motivations that lead students to do well or poorly on tests. (Partial correlations, not reported here, indicated that the relationship between grades and cultural information test scores largely evaporated when measured ability was controlled.)

Dependent variables in the analysis were students' self-reported grades in English, in History and Social Studies, and in Mathematics, and a TALENT composite of self-reported grades in all subjects. The use of self-reported grades, with restricted distributions, can be expected to depress  $R^2$ s in these analyses; but it does not affect the utility of the data for comparisons of the relative effects of independent variables (Picou and Carter, 1976). English, History, and Social Studies are subjects in which cultural capital can be expected to make a difference; standards are diffuse and evaluation is likely to be relatively subjective. By contrast, Mathematics requires the acquisition of specific skills in the classroom setting, and students are evaluated primarily on the basis of their success in generating correct answers to sets of problems. Thus Welch et al. (1980) report that Mathematics achievement test scores are much more strongly influenced by years of school subject matter instruction than are achievement test scores in English and Civics.

The regression results are displayed in Table 3. They provide striking confirmation of the hypothesis that cultural capital is positively related to high school grades. Standardized regression coefficients for cultural capital (factor 3) are significant at  $p \leq .001$  for both males and females for grades in all subjects but Mathematics, where effects are smaller, but still significant. For English, History/Social Studies, and All Grades, the impact of cultural capital is of the same order of magnitude as the effect of measured ability. Cultural interests (factor 1) and middlebrow activity (factor 4) have no significant impact on grades. As expected, the impact of father's education is minimal.

These results support the expectation of both the cultural reproduction and the cultural mobility models that participation in prestigious status cultures has a significantly positive impact on grades. (Factors such as self-reported grades that depress the  $R^2$ s should not affect the relative weights of ability and cultural capital. The latter, rather than the total variance explained, is the focus of this analysis.) Indeed, the magnitude of the effects relative to those of ability was unexpectedly great. The findings also tend to disconfirm two possible alternative explanations of the association between grades and cultural measures. If

---

status culture; arts attendance is the single measure most commonly used as a proxy for cultural capital in other work; literature reading is also a proxy that has been used in the past; symphony audiences are the most elite of all arts audiences; performance is probably related to formal training; and each of these variables is relatively strongly related to ability and to family status.

<sup>7</sup> Father's education was included as the sole background measure because analysis of similar TALENT samples (e.g. Crouse et al., 1979) showed little benefit from inclusion of multiple background measures as predictors of grades, and because the cultural measures were more strongly related to father's than to mother's education for both genders.

Table 3. Results of Regression of Grades on Ability (1), Father's Education (2), Cultural Capital (3), Middlebrow Activity (4), and Cultural Interests (5) for Male and Female Eleventh Graders

Dependent Variable		Increase in R <sup>2</sup> with							Reduction in beta of father's education with
		1	2	3	4	5	R <sup>2</sup>	Vars. 3-5	Vars. 3-5
MALES									
Grades in All Subjects	B	.5078	.1158	2.2330	.1488	-.1256	.1228	.0286	.0202
	s.e.	.0623	.0971	.4330	.4830	.3830			
	beta	.2791***	.0409	.1706***	.0106	-.0113			
Grades in English	B	.0493	.0223	.2730	-.0025	.0412	.1034	.0310	.0211
	s.e.	.0077	.0120	.0540	.0603	.0476			
	beta	.2255***	.0660	.1716***	-.0015	.0309			
Grades in History	B	.0715	.0012	.2646	-.0059	.0259	.1279	.0254	.0193
	s.e.	.0080	.0125	.0561	.0627	.0495			
	beta	.3096***	.0033	.1577***	-.0033	.0184			
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0510	.0189	.1685	.0133	-.0387	.0723	.0102	.0124
	s.e.	.0082	.0128	.0575	.0625	.0507			
	beta	.2223***	.0531	.1011**	.0075	-.0277			
N = 809									
FEMALES									
Grades in All Subjects	B	.5988	.0939	2.4314	.4223	-.1250	.1897	.0338	.0297
	s.e.	.0575	.0857	.3887	.3925	.3361			
	beta	.3374***	.0345	.1901***	.0346	-.0124			
Grades in English	B	.0602	.0150	.3412	-.0062	.0127	.1683	.0463	.0300
	s.e.	.0072	.0106	.0482	.0485	.0412			
	beta	.2797***	.0457	.2211***	-.0042	.0106			
Grades in History	B	.0710	.0111	.3354	.0352	.0443	.1713	.0382	.0294
	s.e.	.0079	.0116	.0531	.0534	.0453			
	beta	.2991***	.0305	.1970***	.0218	.0333			
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0653	-.0066	.1302	.0750	-.0671	.0857	.0079	.0091
	s.e.	.0082	.0121	.0551	.0555	.0471			
	beta	.2781***	-.0185	.0774*	.0469	-.0511			
N = 917									

\*  $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed.\*\*  $p \leq .01$ , two-tailed.\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , two-tailed.

these measures tapped some general dimension of academic achievement motivation, we would expect the impact on grades in Mathematics to equal those on other subjects. In fact, it does not. If the scores reflected some underlying dimension of creativity, factor 4 would have a significant impact on grades; again, it does not.

The findings provide limited support for the expectations of either model about the extent to which cultural capital mediates the relationship between family background and school success. While the inclusion of the cultural capital measures does reduce the betas for father's education by 20 to 80 percent, the original betas are so low that these figures are somewhat trivial. The extent to which these measures affect grades independent of the impact of father's education squares with the predictions of the cultural mobility model.

The third proposition of the cultural reproduction model holds that returns to cultural capital will be greater for students from high

status homes than from low status backgrounds. By contrast, the cultural mobility model posits that the impact of cultural capital will be greater on the grades of less advantaged youth, for whom the acquisition and display of prestigious cultural resources may be a vital part of upward mobility.

The male and female samples were each divided into three groups on the basis of father's education: sons and daughters (respectively) of college graduates, sons and daughters of high school graduates who did not graduate from college, and sons and daughters of men who did not hold high school diplomas. Separate regressions were run on each of these six subsamples.

Tables 4 and 5 indicate divergent results for men and women. Among women, the impact of cultural capital on all four grade measures rises monotonically with father's education. As the cultural reproduction model predicts, returns to cultural capital are greatest to women from high status families and least to women from



Table 4. Results of Regressions of Grades on Ability (1), Cultural Attitudes (2), Cultural Capital (3), and Middlebrow Activity (4) for Male Eleventh Graders with Non-High School Graduate, High School Graduate, and College Graduate Fathers

Dependent Variable		1	2	3	4	R <sup>2</sup>	Increase in R <sup>2</sup> with Vars. 2-4
<i>Males with Non-High School Graduate Fathers</i>						N=494	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.4384	-.6358	2.0638	.7770	.0865	.0297
	s.e.	.0724	.4530	.5302	.5828		
	beta	.2515***	-.0614	.1616***	.0583		
Grades in English	B	.0559	-.0743	.3026	.1267	.0998	.0404
	s.e.	.0093	.0586	.0693	.0764		
	beta	.2604***	-.0577	.1885***	.0752		
Grades in History	B	.0632	-.0195	.2549	.0061	.0957	.0223
	s.e.	.0098	.0618	.0732	.0806		
	beta	.2796***	-.0144	.1508***	.0034		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0345	-.0560	.0490	.0492	.0257	.0025
	s.e.	.0098	.0622	.0736	.0811		
	beta	.1572***	-.0426	.0299	.0286		
<i>Males with High School Graduate Fathers</i>						N=298	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.5397	.6665	2.0630	-.3403	.1216	.0289
	s.e.	.0986	.6205	.7008	.7307		
	beta	.2903***	.0596	.1568**	-.0258		
Grades in English	B	.0504	.0172	.2396	-.0888	.0951	.0387
	s.e.	.0129	.0804	.0910	.0954		
	beta	.2184***	.1264*	.1482**	-.0549		
Grades in History	B	.0857	-.0374	.3433	-.0570	.1760	.0422
	s.e.	.0128	.0799	.0904	.0948		
	beta	.3568***	-.0264	.2039***	-.0338		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0608	.0230	.2385	-.0731	.0809	.0189
	s.e.	.0142	.0881	.0997	.1046		
	beta	.2424***	.0156	.1357*	-.0415		
<i>Males with College Graduate Fathers</i>						N=130	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.4274	.2767	1.5914	.1906	.0702	.0178
	s.e.	.1735	1.0292	1.0230	1.2428		
	beta	.2088*	.0237	.1315	.0135		
Grades in English	B	.0242	.1253	.1774	-.0555	.0337	.0175
	s.e.	.0214	.0493	.1243	.1553		
	beta	.1010	.0371	.1276	-.0337		
Grades in History	B	.0651	.2500	.0723	-.0339	.0959	.0285
	s.e.	.0233	.1361	.1350	.1687		
	beta	.2421**	.1676	.0463	-.0183		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0625	-.1276	.0963	.1436	.0670	.0123
	s.e.	.0233	.1362	.1351	.1688		
	beta	.2362**	-.0867	.0625	.0787		

\*  $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed.\*\*  $p \leq .01$ , two-tailed.\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ , two-tailed.

low status families. Among the former group, the impact of cultural capital exceeds that of ability on grades in History and approaches it even for grades in Mathematics.

By contrast, among males the positive impact of cultural capital on grades is restricted to students from lower and middle status households. Sons of college graduates were no more likely to receive good grades if they scored high on factor 3 than if they did not. These results for males are consistent with the expectations of the cultural mobility model.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES

The male and female samples differed markedly in the relationships between family background and returns to cultural capital. As the cultural reproduction model would predict, cultural capital had its largest impact on the daughters of women whose fathers were college graduates. Effects on grades of daughters of high school graduates without college degrees were smaller, and effects on grades of daughters of men without high school diplomas

Table 5. Results of Regressions of Grades on Ability (1), Cultural Attitudes (2), Cultural Capital (3), and Middlebrow Activity (4) for Female Eleventh Graders with Non-High School Graduate, High School Graduate, and College Graduate Fathers

Dependent Variable		1	2	3	4	R <sup>2</sup>	Increase in R <sup>2</sup> with Vars. 2-4
<i>Females with Non-High School Graduate Fathers</i>						N=582	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.5006	.3136	2.2030	.7400	.1453	.0310
	s.e.	.0660	.3966	.5010	.4966		
	beta	.2930***	.0331	.1636***	.0614		
Grades in English	B	.0440	.0906	.3312	-.0195	.1148	.0452
	s.e.	.0086	.0504	.0651	.0633		
	beta	.2093***	.0788	.2036***	-.0133		
Grades in History	B	.0654	.0958	.2638	.0213	.1358	.0272
	s.e.	.0093	.0546	.0705	.0685		
	beta	.2840***	.0761	.1479***	.0145		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0450	-.0693	-.0005	.1535	.0442	.0075
	s.e.	.0098	.0577	.0745	.0724		
	beta	.1943***	-.0548	-.0003	.0951*		
<i>Females with High School Graduate Fathers</i>						N=342	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.6216	-.8526	2.7058	.3466	.1776	.0494
	s.e.	.0980	.5542	.6034	.6064		
	beta	.3266***	-.0844	.2238***	.0301		
Grades in English	B	.0629	-.0831	.3641	-.0114	.1755	.0659
	s.e.	.0115	.0657	.0715	.0722		
	beta	.2906***	-.0720	.2608***	.0086		
Grades in History	B	.0634	-.0008	.4029	.0278	.1640	.0611
	s.e.	.0132	.0749	.0816	.0824		
	beta	.2585***	-.0006	.2546***	.0185		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0870	-.1431	.2245	.0647	.1384	.0230
	s.e.	.0141	.0804	.0875	.0884		
	beta	.3356***	-.1034	.1343*	.0406		
<i>Females with College Graduate Fathers</i>						N=113	
Grades in All Subjects	B	.7317	-.6325	4.1952	-.2707	.2034	.0910
	s.e.	.1738	1.0617	1.1567	1.2902		
	beta	.3714***	-.0530	.2968***	-.0174		
Grades in English	B	.0913	-.0148	.4244	-.0566	.2093	.0729
	s.e.	.0214	.1264	.1386	.1561		
	beta	.3894***	-.0108	.2649**	-.0317		
Grades in History	B	.0673	-.0764	.6174	.0944	.1644	.1160
	s.e.	.0247	.1459	.1600	.1801		
	beta	.2557**	-.0496	.3431***	.0470		
Grades in Mathematics	B	.0702	-.0924	.3971	.0661	.1216	.0578
	s.e.	.0235	.1387	.1521	.1713		
	beta	.2877**	-.0647	.2380*	.0355		

\* p≤.05, two-tailed.  
\*\* p≤.01, two-tailed.  
\*\*\* p≤.001, two-tailed.

were smaller still. By contrast the impact of cultural capital on grades was substantial, relative to that of ability, for sons of men in the two less educated groups, but negligible for sons of college graduates. This finding is consistent with the cultural mobility model.

The divergent findings for male and female samples were part of an overall pattern of gender differences that together suggest that cultural capital plays a different role in the mobility strategies of men and women. First, the women in the sample expressed substantially more interest and reported greater participa-

tion in high culture activities than did the men. Second, the individual cultural measures were more strongly related to ability scores for males. Third, the specific attitude, activity, and information measures were, in every case, more strongly correlated with family background (both father's and mother's education) for girls than for boys (table available upon request). And the intercorrelations among the cultural measures were stronger for high status girls than for lower status girls, suggesting that a more coherent status culture participation pattern existed within the high status group.

No such differences appeared for boys. (Three way cross-tabulations, controlling for father's education, were executed for each pair of the cultural interest and cultural activity questions. The bivariate relationships were strongest among college educated men's daughters, but not among their sons.)

These findings suggest that cultural interests and activities were culturally prescribed for teenage girls, while for adolescent boys they were less strongly prescribed, perhaps even negatively sanctioned by peers. High cultural involvements may have been part of an identity kit that academically successful, high status girls, but not similar boys, possessed.

This interpretation is consistent, as well, with an additional gender difference revealed in the correlation matrix. Reading literature was more strongly related to cultural attitudes for girls than other activities, while arts attendance and performing were more strongly related to attitudes for boys. If having cultural interests were part of the good student role for girls, then we would expect literature reading to be most strongly related to interest in other cultural fields; for in literature reading the culture inculcated by the upper middle-class home and that inculcated by the school reinforce each other. As may have been the case for sons of college graduates, to the extent that culturally oriented students were not necessarily successful or conformist students, cultural interests would most likely be expressed precisely through those activities that the school does not teach—for example, performing or arts attendance.

Coleman found in *The Adolescent Society* (1961:118–27) that leading-crowd girls were more likely to exhibit conformist characteristics and less likely to be as interested in popular music as their peers than leading-crowd boys. The high school years—particularly in an era in which high school enrollments were rising rapidly—may have been a kind of cultural latency period during which high status boys rebelled against parental values. Boys with educated fathers who were culturally oriented may have been less involved in their peer groups and less likely to possess other traits that lead to school success than were other boys. Those high status boys who were not academically oriented may have used high culture as an alternative arena for achievement. By contrast, boys from humble backgrounds who were upwardly mobile may have begun to enter the status culture of the upper middle class during high school. Upwardly mobile boys may have been more inclined to express cultural interests and to participate in cultural activities than were upper middle-class boys, who took such interests for

granted. By the same token, teachers may have rewarded students from lower status backgrounds who exhibited interests and behavior expected from higher status students.

Conversely, cultural capital seems to have been part of an identity shared by academically successful high school girls. In a society in which men monopolize careers and control the material rewards they carry, it is all the more important for women to distinguish themselves through fundamentally cultural markets. Elder (1974: ch. 8) has observed that women lead “contingent careers”; to a greater extent than men they are evaluated and rewarded on the basis of ascriptive and diffuse criteria. Women who wish to be recognized as eligible partners for men from high status backgrounds may need cultural capital to a greater extent than men who wish to achieve in the world of work. For boys from high status families, it may be more important, in high school, to develop a taste for women who appreciate culture than to develop a taste for high culture itself.

## CONCLUSIONS

The relatively low correlations between parental education and cultural capital are notable. An analysis of the responses of a cross-sectional sample of American adults to questions that included a broader range of cultural attendance activities, but required a greater specificity as to the extent of the activity, found correlations of both occupational status and educational attainment with culture consumption of approximately .40 (Gruenberg, 1975:200). To the extent that the TALENT data on arts attendance are comparable to the ISR data employed by Gruenberg, they indicate that well-educated parents passed down 30 percent of their cultural advantage to their sons and 60 percent to their daughters.<sup>8</sup> If, as Bourdieu argues, early socialization is critical to an adult's inclination and ability to consume high culture, the inheritance may lessen with age. It is also possible, however, that opportunities afforded by the school and peer group only temporarily attenuate the relationship between family background and cultural involvement during high school; or that the adolescent rebellion described by Coleman (1961) and Stinchcombe (1964) during the early 1960s temporarily depressed the correlation among the boys in the TALENT sample. While firmer conclusions await analysis of the impact of an array of background measures on students'

<sup>8</sup> These figures are the ratios of the correlations between arts attendance and father's education to the .40 correlation Gruenberg reports, for boys and girls respectively.

cultural capital, these findings lend tentative support to Jencks and Riesman's assertion (1968) that the level of cultural mobility in the United States has been relatively high. The findings also suggest that cultural capital is less strongly tied to parental background traits than Bourdieu's theory or similar discussions of class and culture in the United States would predict. Whether more direct measures than education or parents' cultural capital would reveal a stronger inheritance remains to be seen.

It follows from these findings that educational attainment is a very imperfect proxy for cultural capital. A second, and related, lesson is that single measures of "cultural capital" or participation in status cultures are inadequate. Abandoning the use of such variables as educational attainment or self-reported arts attendance as single proxies for status culture participation raises formidable methodological puzzles, but these must be confronted.

An ideal data set for our purposes would contain measures of cultural capital grounded in research on adult elites in a single community; objective measures of grades, standardized by school; data on teachers' evaluations of students' characters and aptitudes; and observationally grounded measures of students' interaction style, both linguistic and nonverbal. The TALENT data were not collected for our purposes and are not ideally

suited for them. The use of self-reported grades, the elimination of high school dropouts and minority children from the data, and the self-reports of cultural participation all can be expected to reduce the impact of cultural capital on grades. What is more, the use of national data limits this assessment to the impact of participation in a national elite status culture, and does not permit estimation of the effects of local status culture variations.

Even with these limitations, the data show that cultural capital has an impact on high school grades that is highly significant and that, in nontechnical subjects, approaches the contribution of measured ability. This finding confirms rather dramatically the utility of the perspective advanced here. It remains, however, to assess the impact of cultural capital on such outcomes as educational attainment, college quality, marital selection, and occupational attainment; to develop better measures of cultural capital; to assess the differing role cultural capital may play in the mobility strategies of different class segments; and to compare the influence of cultural capital in different kinds of educational and occupational settings. In all these arenas, conceiving of status as a cultural process which influences success by affecting the outcomes of interactions may yield important gains in our ability to understand the status attainment process as a whole.

#### APPENDIX

Table A-1. Means and Standard Deviations of Talent Measures

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
INTEREST (5 = high; 1 = low)			
In being a musical composer	2.29 (boys)	1.33	1355
	2.84 (girls)	1.46	1401
In being a poet	1.97	1.19	1354
	2.49	1.47	1380
In being an artist	2.48	1.43	1364
	3.11	1.53	1406
In visiting art galleries	2.10	1.29	1310
	2.73	1.48	1385
In reading literature	2.51	1.30	1258
	3.14	1.47	1353
In attending symphony concerts	2.33	1.38	1251
	2.86	1.52	1356
Artistic Interest Inventory (TALENT scale)	16.64	9.16	1384
	21.43	9.87	1426
Musical Interest Inventory (TALENT scale)	13.87	10.85	1384
	18.80	11.41	1425
Literary Linguistic Interest Inventory (TALENT scale)	15.58	8.29	1385
	21.20	8.91	1426
Cultivated Self-Image (TALENT scale)	4.64	2.30	1400
	5.95	2.21	1464
ACTIVITIES			
Drawing, etc., in the past three years	2.24 (boys)	1.27	1398
(5 = very often; 1 = never)	2.69 (girls)	1.34	1416
Acting, etc., in the past three years	1.97	1.23	1403
(5 = very often; 1 = never)	2.62	1.40	1411

## Appendix (Continued)

Table A-1. Means and Standard Deviations of Talent Measures

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Attending concerts, etc., in the past three years (1 = very often; 6 = never)	3.85 3.37	1.46 1.42	1372 1420
Books, plays, poetry, etc. read the past three months (0 = none; 5 = 5 or more)	1.15 1.80	1.75 1.99	1340 1396
INFORMATION			
Literature information test (low = 0; high = 24)	13.28 13.12	4.60 4.47	1402 1463
Music information test (low = 0; high = 12)	6.29 6.88	3.04 3.00	1401 1461
Art information test (low = 0; high = 12)	6.38 6.62	2.51 2.58	1386 1423
MIDDLEBROW ACTIVITY (3-year frequency, 5 = very often; 1 = never)			
Photography (excluding occasional snapshots)	1.74 (boys) 1.41 (girls)	1.15 0.87	1446 1474
Making jewelry, pottery, etc.	1.62 1.72	0.95 0.96	1442 1472
Cabinet making or woodworking	2.36 1.15	1.24 0.46	1435 1469
Sewing, etc.	1.27 3.65	0.73 1.19	1432 1469
Mark the one answer indicating the highest level of education your father reached:			
4 = none, or some grade school	11.27 (boys)	3.53	1166
8 = completed grade school	11.14 (girls)	3.60	1237
10 = some high school, but did not graduate			
12 = graduated from high school			
13 = vocational or business school after high school			
14 = some junior or regular college, but did not graduate			
16 = graduated from regular 4-year college			
17 = master's degree			
18 = some work toward doctorate or professional degree			
20 = completed doctorate or professional degree			
Mark the one answer indicating the highest level of education your mother reached:	11.52 (boys) 11.28 (girls)	2.75 2.99	1204 1277
The following questions ask you to report your grades in courses you have taken in the ninth grade or later. Please consider only semester grades. If you have not taken any courses in the topic, skip the item. In these questions, choose the one answer that best describes your grades.			
6 = all A's or equivalent	3 = mostly B's and C's or equivalent		
5 = mostly A's or equivalent	2 = mostly C's and D's or equivalent		
4 = mostly A's and B's or equivalent	1 = mostly D's and below or equivalent		
My grades in history and social studies have been	3.52 3.61	1.27 1.25	1296 1361
My grades in English courses have been	3.36 3.59	1.21 1.02	1299 1351
TALENT Composite of self-reported grades	23.34 26.19	9.71 9.52	1370 1424

## REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, Pierre  
1977 "Cultural reproduction and social reproduction." Pp. 487-511 in Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education*. New York: Oxford.
- 1977 *Reproduction in Education, Society, Culture*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage.
- Cicourel, Aaron and John Kitsuse  
1963 *The Education Decision-Makers*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Coleman, James C.  
1961 *The Adolescent Society*. New York: Free Press.
- Coleman, Richard  
1971 *Social Status in the City*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Collins, Randall  
 1975 *Conflict Sociology*. New York: Academic.  
 1979 *The Credential Society*. New York: Academic.  
 1981 "The micro-foundations of macro-sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 86:984-1014.
- Crouse, James, Peter Mueser and Christopher Jencks  
 1979 "Latent variable models of status attainment." *Social Science Research* 8:348-68.
- DiMaggio, Paul and Michael Useem  
 1978 "Cultural democracy in a period of cultural expansion: the social composition of arts audiences in the United States." *Social Problems* 26:180-97.
- Elder, Glen  
 1974 *Children of the Great Depression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, Fred  
 1975 "Gatekeeping and the melting pot." *Harvard Educational Review* 45:44-70.
- Flanagan, John C. et al.  
 1964 *The American High School Student*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, PROJECT TALENT.
- Goffman, Erving  
 1951 "Symbols of class status." *British Journal of Sociology* 2:298-312.
- Gruenberg, Barry  
 1975 *How Free is Free Time? Analysis of Some Determinants of Leisure Activity Patterns*. Manuscript. Middletown, CT.
- Gumperz, John J. and Dell Hymes  
 1972 *Directions in Sociolinguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Hollingshead, August B.  
 1949 *Elmtown's Youth*. New York: Wiley.
- Jencks, Christopher et al.  
 1979 *Who Gets Ahead? The Determinants of Economic Success in America*. New York: Basic.
- Jencks, Christopher and David Riesman  
 1968 *The Academic Revolution*. New York: Doubleday.
- Lortie, Dan  
 1975 *Schoolteacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McDermott, R. P.  
 1977 "Social relations as contexts for learning in school." *Harvard Educational Review* 47:198-213.
- Mehan, Hugh  
 1974 "Accomplishing classroom lessons." Pp. 76-142 in Aaron Cicourel et al., *Language Use and School Performance*. New York: Academic.
- Picou, J. Steven and Michael Carter  
 1976 "Significant-other influences and aspirations." *Sociology of Education* 49:12-22.
- Porter, James N.  
 1974 "Race, socialization, and mobility in educational and early occupational attainment." *American Sociological Review* 39:303-16.
- Portes, Alejandro and Kenneth L. Wilson  
 1976 "Black-White differences in educational attainment." *American Sociological Review* 41:414-31.
- Rindskopf, David  
 1979 *Arts Education in Public Secondary Schools: Offerings, Enrollments, and their Determinants*. Technical Memorandum #AH-46. St. Louis: CEMREL, Inc.
- Sewell, William and Robert M. Hauser  
 1975 *Education, Occupation, and Earnings: Achievement in the Early Career*. New York: Academic.
- Stinchcombe, Arthur  
 1964 *Rebellion in a High School*. Chicago: Quadrangle.
- Warner, W. Lloyd, Robert J. Havighurst and Martin B. Loeb  
 1944 *Who Shall Be Educated?* New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Weber, Max  
 1968 *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster Press.
- Welch, Wayne W., Ronald E. Anderson and Linda J. Harris  
 1980 "The effects of schooling on math achievement." Mimeo, University of Minnesota.
- Wolf, Dennis and Howard Gardiner  
 1979 "Style and sequence." Pp. 117-138 in Margery Franklin and Nancy R. Smith (eds.), *Symbolic Functioning in Childhood*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.